

chitects, perhaps, will consider them illiberal, mercenary, and deficient in a proper appreciation of the high office of art; but people in general will say that the committee are quite right to get as much as they can for their money; and the architects will again say that this is only additional evidence of the widespread deficiency of all æsthetic feeling. To this general accusation I venture to take exceptions; it is not the committee or the public who are principally in error, but the profession. So long as architects hold themselves and their art so very cheaply, that they will not only rush into any public competition, and embarrass the committee with a surfeit of choice, but will demean themselves so far as to intrigue for permission to submit a design, even though it be known that an architect is already in consultation, they should not be surprised if they are treated with some of the contempt such mean and paltry conduct deserves. If we do not respect ourselves and each other, and act towards each other with the courtesy such a feeling induces, we cannot be surprised if the public follow the example afforded by architects, and are deficient in their respectful treatment of the profession.

Let us look at competitions in another view. According to the hypothesis of architects, all the public are ignorant of architecture, particularly building committees; and there never was a competition in which the selection was made strictly according to the merits of the design, or the conditions laid down by the committee in their instructions: consequently there is no use in engaging in a competition without the advantage of a friend at court. According to the practice of architects, competitions are such fine opportunities for achieving distinction, it is quite worth while to devote a considerable amount of time and money, in order to obtain admission into the lists; and the amount of talent each competitor possesses is so overwhelming, that he is quite certain of taking the judgment of the committee (although they are hypothetically unequal to a judgment), and that, consequently, the committee are most impartial and competent. And so long as the profession offer such practical evidence of their faith in committees, can we wonder if committees and the public adopt a testimony so flattering to their self-love? It matters not to these gentlemen that the fifty designs have cost, at a low estimate, 500*l.* actually expended out of the pockets of the profession: that is no concern of theirs: if architects like to engage in speculations of this kind, and the public benefit by the monomania, is it likely that the public will forego the advantage? If we were in similar circumstances, should we not differently?

Various suggestions have at times been made for placing competitions on a basis of greater equity, but I do not think that the system is capable of any such amendment: it is radically bad, and should be abolished altogether. Experience has so satisfied me of the general incapacity of committees to select the best design from any number that may be submitted, that I carefully avoid engaging in competitions except under very peculiar circumstances. Were designs sent in with the proper name of each competitor legibly affixed thereto, and publicly exhibited before selection, the opportunity for a public introduction might yield some consolation for disappointment, and redeem labour and money from utter loss. But whilst the award is made by a syndicate proverbially irresponsible, who in their corporate capacity are troubled with no tenderness of conscience, not even with a sense of honour, whilst the names of competitors are unknown, or are only revealed through the indiscretion of an honorary secretary, and whilst such repeated attempts are made to lower the respectability of the profession, and reduce the sufficiently low scale of remuneration, I consider that all who so compete betray the best interests of the whole body, and act injuriously each for his own interest.

The system of architectural competitions is entirely without analogy in any other profession: it is so very peculiar "none, but itself can be its parallel." If a man be at death's

door, be the disease under which he is sinking ever so singular, and the danger ever so imminent, he does not invite the doctors to a competition, and offer a premium of 10*l.* or 20*l.* for the best prescription; but he has a consultation of two or three, or perhaps half a dozen of his own, or his friends' selection, pays each his proper fee, and then lives or dies as it may happen.

If an attorney have a cause in Chancery or any other court (of course, if he be a fortunate man it will be in the former), he does not think of offering 5*l.* or 50*l.* for the best opinion, but, according to the nature of the case, he chooses his counsel, gets the opinion, pays for it, and enters it in his ledger to the debit of his client. He allows no considerations of the difficulties to be encountered by young and unknown barristers to interfere with that routine which experience has shown to be the best for all the parties concerned; but leaves Mr. Briefcase and Mr. Done-up to bide their time. So in the church and the army and navy: in none of these are there competitions like those to which architects are liable: the ordinary spirit of competition which pervades all businesses of course influences these: the church has its simony, and the army its purchased promotions; but there are the usual accompaniments of connexions and money. But architectural competitions are *ex sui generis*: their best plea (professionally speaking), that of affording openings to young men of talent, who would otherwise "bloom unseen, and waste their fragrance on the desert air," and all that nonsense, I believe to be entirely fallacious. In the first place, I never knew of an architectural competition in which the selection was made in strict accordance with the conditions prescribed, or in which there were not strong grounds for suspecting the existence of secret influence; unless there be exceptions in the St. George's Hall and Assize Courts competitions in this town; but these exceptions prove the rule. It is seldom that the business is conducted in so barefaced a manner as at the Ipswich grammar school; but generally speaking, the successful man has some friend or Scotch cousin on the committee, to whose good offices he is indebted for success; clearly showing that it is not the *friendless* young man who succeeds, but he who has interest, and for him the competition may be a successful blind.

I believe that, generally speaking, architects begin to practise at too early an age. It not unfrequently happens that shortly after the expiration of his articles, the tyro takes an office, paints up his name, hires a boy, and then sits down to wait for business. Who can wonder if he finds the public chary of their faith in his great abilities? I am sure I have no wish to under-rate them, but fear they are unsupported by experience, that *pubulum vite* of success. I have no doubt that he is a very competent draughtsman, particularly in ecclesiastical architecture; that he can make good caricatures and illustrations; copy a specification, though unable to write one, and square dimensions with accuracy and despatch. But these acquirements, manifold though they be, and the results of five or six years' pupillage, do not make an architect,—they scarcely constitute the undeveloped rudiments of one.

The fact is, we want schools of architecture, offices in which the principal has the ambition not only to accumulate money, to make a lucrative business, but to practise architecture, and educate architects; and to accomplish the latter it is manifest that he must offer his pupils and assistants adequate inducement, pecuniary and otherwise, that they may stay with him; but this I fear is very far from the usual practice (I mean in London and throughout the country): architects, though professors of a liberal art, screw their assistants just as much as any merchant or tradesman screws his; consequently, the number of practising architects increases in a ratio much greater than the amount of business to be shared amongst them; and as drowning men catch at straws, many of them jump at a competition, or anything else which gives a glimmer of business. Unfortunately their conduct reacts upon older practitioners; and so altogether the public

form a very disrespectful, not to say contemptuous, opinion of the profession.

Now, in the high and palmy days of art, either in Greece or Italy, different eminent masters founded or adopted various schools, each practising its own peculiar style, and each with its own recognised head, who had his full staff of assistants; and as these would necessarily vary in talent and experience, the division of labour,—that prime secret of pre-eminence in every pursuit,—was more readily attained than in the present day, when every architect is expected to be an admirable Crichton, "a perfect monster, which the world ne'er saw;" not only thoroughly acquainted with all the fine arts in theory and general effects, but perfectly grounded in all their respective details: of knowledge more extended than was required by Vitruvius; prepared to design in every style which has ever prevailed "from Indus to the pole," whether the edifice be a series of wine-vaults, like the rock-cut temples of Ellora,—a palace of industry, after the temple of Karnak,—a refreshment saloon, like a Chinese pavilion,—or a Swiss cottage in the fens of Lincolnshire: to say nothing of churches, strictly ecclesiastical; club-houses and offices *à la renaissance*; castellated gables, and Grecian court-houses. Now it must be manifest, and that without depreciating the talent of the present race of professional men, that the architect of past time, who confined himself to the development of one style, giving to its rudimentary forms the expressions which naturally sprang from idiosyncrasy or circumstances, would probably attain a higher reach of excellence in the particular school to which he confined himself; and having a good staff of competent assistants, he would be able to supervise a much greater extent and variety of work than if he were embarrassed with all the details of each separate building; and the assistants, by changing their engagements from time to time, would be able to study the different character of every school, until they had adopted some one of those existing, or had acquired materials from which to develop a new style.

I see no force in the argument, sometimes used, that the position of the modern architect is rendered difficult from the variety of styles now existent. I do not think that the Freemasons experienced this difficulty. When Lalys, who was architect to Neath Abbey and Henry I., practised architecture after his return from the Holy Land, I find no record of his ever building an Egyptian Hall like that in Piccadilly; or that he put an obelisk instead of a spire on a church tower; and although he and other mediæval architects must have seen or heard of the works of ancient Rome, if not those of ancient Greece, they did not attempt to revive an effete style, but, satisfied of its unsuitability to time and place, they contented themselves with pursuing the track commenced by their ancestors, and you know to what grand and beautiful results that track led those by whom it was steadily, and through centuries, pursued.

THE PORTLAND GALLERY, REGENT-STREET.

THE private view of the exhibition of the "National Institution of Fine Arts," on the 12th inst. was numerously and well attended: a crowd filled every room, and comprised many eminent as well as notorious persons: artists, literary men, pretty women, priests, prelates, and peers, were singularly mixed; as our readers will guess, when we say that: one moment the Bishop of London, Cardinal Wiseman, and Father Gavazzi were standing shoulder to shoulder!

We notice with great pleasure the steady progress of this institution, and congratulate the members on the fair promise given that their exhibition will become one of real national interest, and only second in importance to that of the Royal Academy.

The increasing difficulty of procuring a favourable position on the walls of the Academy, or of the contemporary societies, will doubtless induce many rising members of

* To be continued.